A

PINDARICK

ODE

ON

PAINTING.

ADDRESSED TO

JOSHUA REYNOLDS, Esq.

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THE

PREFACE.

AS the ſubject of this Ode is, from the copiouſneſs of it, almoſt an inexhauſtible one (were I to take notice of all the minuter branches of this art, in which the ſeveral maſters have diſtinguiſh'd themſelves, ſuch as the painting of fruit, flowers, ſtill-life, game, buildings, ſhips, &c.) I have confin'd myſelf chiefly to the three greater ſpecies of it: namely, Hiſtory (under which Battle-painting may juſtly be included) Landſkip and Portraiture----and as, in a compoſition of this length, I imagin'd that the perpetual recurrence of the ſame meaſure in ſuch a multiplicity of ſtanzas would have been rather languid and fatiguing, I have therefore indulg'd myſelf in many different kinds of metre; but, at the ſame time, have blended them as harmoniouſly as I could contrive; by which indulgence I have not only conſulted my own eaſe, but hope I have likewiſe, in ſome degree, conſulted the pleaſure of the Reader, by entertaining his ear, at leaſt, with a little variety of wild muſic, even if the compoſition ſhould have no other ſort of merit to recommend it.

PREFACE.

A

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I.

SWEET mimick art! Which to our raviſh'd eyes,
From a few blended colours, and the aid
Of attemper'd light and ſhade,
Bid'ſt a new creation riſe---
Oh! to this ſong of tributary praiſe,
Which Poetry thy ſiſter art
Now with friendly homage pays,
Could I contrive thy beauties to impart!
With my eaſy flowing line
To unite correctneſs of deſign,
And make a TITIAN's colouring conſpire
With RAPHAEL's grace, and BUANOROTI's fire---

II.

And this moment I perceive
(Or does ſome illuſion bleſs me,
Some ſweet madneſs now poſſeſs me?)
My tumultuous boſom heave,
Like the rapt SIBYLL's when ſhe feels the load,
The painful influence of th' in-ruſhing God---

III.

Yes--- once again with joy I find
(Nor think my friend th' aſſertion bold)
This languid age-enfeebled mind,
As in life's prime, it's powers unfold---
Again th' ideal ſcenes ariſe,
The viſions ſtream before my eyes,
Reſiſtleſs on the rous'd imagination pour,
And paint themſelves as lively as before-----

IV.

But be this mental picture grac'd
With all th' adornings fancy can beſtow,
How is it's beauty now effac'd,
How faſt all it's ſplendor declines,
Out-dazzled by thoſe brighter lines
Which on yonder canvas glow----

V.

Where---by th' Hiſtorick pencil's aid
Whoſe ages are at once diſplay'd---

Some

Some great event of Rome or Greece
Fills perhaps each high wrought piece---
There---ſome triumphal pomp proceeds---
There---th' impetuous battle bleeds---
Mark! while they engage
What ardor what rage,
How ſhields are claſh'd with ſhields---
And with what force up-rais'd in air,
Each warrior brawny arm ſtript bare,
Darts th' keen ſpear, or glittering faulchion wields,
And while it aims the ſtroke, or while repels,
How juſtly each inflated muſcle ſwells----

VI.

With the ſame noble warmth impreſt,
As with his Lord the gallant beaſt
Was eager to acquire a name,
And combated like him for fame,
See the generous ſteed
Fierce as Circe's high breed
Which ſhe ſtole from her bright-flaming ſire,
While he ſprings on the foe,
Like the ſhaft from the bow,
Scarce imprint the trod ground;
But curvet and bound
As if drawn by a pencil of fire----

VII.

But what endleſs length of verſe
Can ſuffice me to rehearſe
  Th' enliven'd action of the whole?
Squadrons this way, that way bending,
The depicted forms contending
  As inſtinct with real ſoul----

VIII.

Nay---minutely to deſcribe
  The varied helm, peculiar ſhield,
The different aſpect of each tribe
  Which animates th' embattled field,
Would aſk the compaſs of an age,
  To mark the whole---muſt drawl along
  The tedious circumſtantial ſong,
And haply languiſh through the thouſandth page---

IX.

But rapidly by Painting's aid
Is this intelligence convey'd;
  E'en in a ſingle moment's ſpace
We ſee th' extenſive plan unfold,
  Omitted not one trifling grace,
In full the complex tale is told;
The grand exploits of half an Iliad riſe,
And flaſh at once on our aſtoniſh'd eyes----

X. Nor

Nor ſerves this ſweet inſtructive art
T' inform the intellect alone,
But often melts th' obdurate heart
And wakes it's pænitential groan---
For when in ſome great Maſter's draught,
With genius as with judgement fraught,
Nail'd haply to th' accurſed tree,
On his tenter'd wounds ſuſpended,
Every nerve with torture rended,
Th' agnonizing God we ſee---
Supported by her weeping train
While the dolorous mother ſtands
With anguiſh'd features, writhen hands,
Expreſſing e'en ſuperior pain;
Who but muſt mingle in this ſcene of woe,
What breaſt can ceaſe to heave, what eye forbear to flow?

XI.

But ſorrow now o'erpow'rd by fear,
Soon is check'd the ſtarting tear,
While in yonder piece I view,
Which VANDERVELD's bold pencil drew
Through all it's gloom'd extent the ocean
Work'd into wild impetuous motion,
And with more dread t' impreſs the ſoul
Grimly frowns the lurid ſky,
And the condenſing vapours roll,

And the fork'd lightnings fly---
With ſhatter'd ſails and low-bent maſt
Drives before the whirling blaſt
The foundering veſſel---Hark! I hear
(Or does the eye deceive the ear?)
The thunder's voice, the groaning air,
The billows loud roar
While they break on the ſhore,
The cries of the wreck'd, and their ſhrieks of deſpair.

XII.

With pleaſure now I turn my ſight
From horror and death to thoſe ſcenes of delight,
Where Claudio's pencil has eſſay'd
With every heighten'd touch to trace
The wide-ſtretch'd Landſkip's varied face,
And all it's ſweet deluſive ſkill diſplay'd---

XIII.

How the genial colours warm us?
How the gay deceptions charm us?
The objects here advancing nigh
As with brighter tints they bloom---
There receding from the eye
As ſuffus'd with deeper gloom;
And, while here to bound the ſcene,
Their tops half-blended with the ſkies,
The miſty mountains intervene,
Or rocks in dim confuſion riſe;

There

There the wild ocean terminates the view;
It's green waves mingling with th' æthereal blue---

XIV.

And, lo! what numerous beauties grace
Th' enchanted intermediate ſpace!
Rivers winding through the vales,
Here, full in view; there, faintly ſhewn,
Hillocks, inter-mix'd with dales,
Rural cotts at diſtance thrown---
There, ſome foaming cataract pours
From the ſteep cliff it's watery ſtores;
Here, ſpreads it's gloom ſome awful grove,
Through whoſe thick branches interwove,
While the ſun darts his ſlanting beams,
Delightful to the eye the yellowiſh luſtre ſtreams---

XV.

Above the ſtrong illumin'd ſkies,
The clouds in ſhining volumes, roll'd
Their fleecy ſkirts bedeckt with gold,
Half-dazzle the ſpectator's eyes---
And does the real ſolar light
Flaſh at preſent on the ſight?
Or, does the pencil'd radiance only flow,
And flowing with ſuch fervour beat
That e'en with all the dog-days heat
The ſultry painting now appears to glow?

XVI. Beneath

XVI.

Beneath ſome oak's projecting ſhade,
Where the ſhot rays ſcarce paſſage find,
See many a ruſtick youth and maid
In languid attitudes reclin'd----
Mark! with features all relenting,
And with down-caſt eyes conſenting,
How each nymph liſtens to the amorous tale;
Her half-bar'd boſom, panting with deſire,
Expos'd, as if to catch the cooling gale;
But more, perhaps, to fan the lover's fire.

XVII.

Ye dear deceptions! how ye move
The breaſt to long forgotten love?
Luxurious ſcenes! how ye excite
The traces of diſtinct delight!
E'en now around this poor half-frozen heart
Agnizing it's accuſtom'd ſmart,
Like ſome mild lambent flame the paſſion plays;
And, vanquiſh'd by ideal charms,
I ſink in the imagin'd arms
Of ſome ſweet PHILLIS of my youthful days.

XVIII.

But, lo! the Portrait of yon hoary ſage
From whoſe grave lore I learnt in youth
Many a rigid moral truth,
Frowns me again to cold unfeeling age---

How

How are the ſoft emotions checkt
While tow'rd me he ſeems to direct,
As if alive, his conſcious eye;
At whoſe auſtere reproving glance,
I wake reluctant from my trance,
And feel with pain each pleaſing paſſion die!---

XIX.

VENUS yokes her purple doves,
In an inſtant diſpoſſeſt,
All the little ſportive loves
Hurry---hurry from my breaſt---
And the whole charming viſion flits away
Like the night's golden dream at break of envious day--

XX.

Poor human life! how ſhort the date
Aſſign'd thee by relentleſs Fate!----
Poor tranſient Beauty! tender flower!
Still ſhorter thy allotted hour!----
Then ſtretch the canvaſs---quick, my Friend,
Thy pencil ſeize---thy work attend---
E'en exempt from deforming diſeaſes,
How it fades by the torches of Time;
Every moment that flows
Steals the gloſs from the roſe;
Then catch the bright hue while it pleaſes,
And fix the fair face in it's prime.

XXI.

Nay---thus, great Artiſt, has thy hand
To half the high-born beauty of the land
A permanence enſur'd,
And from th' attacks of wrinkling age,
And from the puſtule's venom'd rage
Th' untarniſh'd form ſecur'd---

XXII.

It's dear reſemblance has at leaſt
Been in thy faithful lines expreſt;
In thy firm colours ſtill perſiſts to bloom;
Nor does it ceaſe the heart t' alarm,
Nor does it ceaſe the eye to charm,
E'en when the real Fair is mouldering in her tomb--

XXIII.

And eminent in beauty as in birth,
When the bright LENOX ſhall as well
In the ſame gloomy manſion dwell
And mingle with her kindred regal earth,
Still in thy tints ſhall ſhe ſurvive,
With ſweet attraction ſtill engage,
Still feed the flame as when alive,
And (e'en improv'd by mellowing age
Each charm of perſon and of face)
Still ſacrifice to every grace---

For

XXIV.

For we not ſee the outward form alone
In thy judicious ſtrokes defin'd,
But in them too---diſtinctly ſhewn---
The ſtrong-mark'd features of the mind---
Each charmer's attitude and air
The internal character declare,
With eaſe the varied temper we deſcry,
The full-ſoul beaming from th' expreſſive eye---

XXV.

Here---in the ſweetly penſive mein
Is the ſoft gentle Nature ſeen,
And chaſte reſerve, and modeſt fear,
And artleſs innocence appear---
There---the little ſly coquet
Aiming her inſidious glances:
For trapping hearts each feature ſet,
From the canvaſs makes advances,
Nay---if we credit the deluſive face,
She ſeems juſt ſpringing to our fond embrace---

XXVI.

And if ſuch meaning can be thrown
Into the ſingle form alone---
With what freſh rapture ſhould we gaze,
How would thy kindling genius blaze,

To what ſuperior heights aſpire,
If working on ſome grand deſign,
Where various characters combine
To call forth all it's force, and rouſe thy native fire?---

XXVII.

And that thy hand can equally excel
E'en in this noble part,
This ſhining branch of thy expreſſive art,
To it's own happy labour we appeal,
To that † rich piece whoſe pleaſing fiction
And ſplendid tints with full conviction
Strike the ſpectator, while he views
THALIA and the tragick muſe,
Each eager on her ſide t' engage
Th' unrivall'd Roscius of the Britiſh ſtage---

XXVIII.

Stern and erect the buſkin'd dame
In high dramatick wrath appears,
With energy ſupports her claim
And ſeems to thunder in his ears;
While the inveigling comick Fair,
With aſpect ſly and artful air
To draw her favourite to her arms
Strains every nerve; but as ſhe ſtrives,
With the ſweet attitude contrives
T' impart the ſtronger influence to her charms-- 270

XXIX. Betwixt

† Garrick between Tragedy & Comedy.

Betwixt them with diſtracted mein
The object of their ſtrife is ſeen;
His eyes with wild confuſion roll,
Mixt paſſions, with alternate ſway,
In his ambiguous features play,
And ſpeak as yet the undetermined ſoul;
But that half-aſſenting leer,
Obliquely on the little wheedler thrown,
Portends, though checkt with aukward fear,
That ſoon the apoſtate will be all her own--

XXX.

Spare, Oh! Time, theſe colours; ſpare 'em,
Or with thy tend'reſt touch impair 'em:
At leaſt, for ſome few centuries ſpace,
Shine they with unleſſen'd grace!
They ſhall---yet, Oh! theſe noble works at laſt
Muſt, by the gathering mould o'ercaſt,
Or rotted by the damps, decay,
Or by the air's corroſive power,
Or e'en the ſlowly-fretting hour,
Muſt every trace of beauty melt away.

XXXI.

When er'ſt Apelle's friend enquir'd,
Why touch'd ſo oft in every part
With repeated ſtrokes of art,
The picture which already they admir'd,

The Artiſt, with becoming pride,
" I'm Painting for Eternity," replied.

XXXII.

But vain, great Genius! was thy boaſt;
Long ſince th' eternal piece is loſt----
Thy VENUS now no more expreſſes,
Riſing from her watery bed,
The moiſture from her twiſted treſſes
O'er her dazzling boſom ſpread---
No more thy colours bloom, effac'd by age,
But in the poet's or th' hiſtorian's page.

XXXIII.

Oh then---reject not with diſdain,
Great Artiſt, this unpoliſh'd ſtrain----
Though happy while it may intend
Thy ſhining merits to diſplay,
It may ſerve only in the end
My own weak genius to betray,
May ſhew with what preſumption I aſpire
To build the rhyme
And tow'er ſublime
With PINDAR's vanity without his fire.

XXXIV.

Yet----confide----(for every trifler's breaſt)
And by this influence I preſage

In the long courſe of rolling years,
When all thy labour diſappears,
Yet ſhall this verſe deſcend from age to age,
And, breaking from oblivion's ſhade,
Go on, to flouriſh while thy paintings fade.

XXXV.

If ſo---at preſent though thy hand
May glory of itſelf command,
Nor can the muſe's laurels now,
Though wove with nicer ſkill than mine,
Help to adorn it, while they twine
Round thy already loaden brow---
Yes---if my preſage is not vain---
Yes---if this verſe hereafter ſhould remain---
(Though now indeed as needleſs quite
As at noon's blaze the taper's light)
It may then ſerve to aggrandize thy name,
And add ſome ſplendor to thy future fame.

FINIS.